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SUBJECT: FINLAND LOOKS TO AFGHAN PRT LEADERSHIP IN 2009

Classified By: POLCHIEF GREGORY THOME FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva and other senior GOF officials told PDAS Volker and Ambassador Ware that Finland's Cabinet Committee on Foreign and Security Policy (UTVA) gave a green light to PRT leadership in Afghanistan in 2009. The move will likely involve "alternating" leadership at Mazar-al-Sharif with Sweden; will require an additional 50-60 Finnish troops, which should be deployed in late CY 2008; and comes as part of what Kanerva called a coordinated "Nordic crisis management approach" in Afghanistan. Kanerva and others also said that Finland will offer an OMLT and additional humanitarian assistance. As of PDAS Volker's visit, the UTVA did not approve additional development assistance; not surprisingly, it rejected a lethal weapons donation to Afghan security forces. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On Sept. 15, the GOF's Cabinet Committee on Foreign and Security Policy (UTVA) held discussions that appear likely -- from early signals -- to result in increased Finnish participation in Afghanistan. Earlier in the week, the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs and Interior had submitted to the UTVA a wide-ranging report that examined the current security situation in Afghanistan and presented a range of possible ways in which Finland could increase its civilian and military crisis management presence there (see reftels). The UTVA is made up of the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Interior, Finance, Labor, and Development. It is chaired by President Halonen, and its consensus decisions on foreign policy and security become the basis of all national security policy.

Moving Toward "Yes" on OMLTs, a PRT and Humanitarian Aid

¶3. (C) The UTVA meeting coincided with PDAS Kurt Volker's Sept. 13-15 visit to Finland, and senior MFA and MOD officials who participated in its deliberations briefed he and Ambassador Ware on what was decided and what next steps might include. Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva said that he was very pleased with the direction the talks took. A staunch proponent of greater Finnish contributions to NATO/ISAF, Kanerva reported that the UTVA had generally reached consensus on PRT leadership, an OMLT, and more humanitarian assistance. Regarding the PRT, Finland will begin negotiating with Sweden to take the lead at Mazar-al-Sharif, beginning in 2009. Thereafter, the GOF's plan involves Finland and Sweden "rotating" leadership of that PRT on a regular basis (details TBD). According to senior MOD sources, PRT leadership would require Finland to increase its 100-troop presence to 150 or 160 -- a process that could begin as early as the last quarter of CY2008 (if military plans and political processes proceed according to plan).

14. (C) Kanerva and others said the GOF also hopes to work with Sweden and Norway to introduce a "Nordic approach" to PRT operation in Afghanistan; from Finland's point of view, this would involve an effort to help Norway and Sweden adopt aspects of the GOF's PRT model, which has won praise from ISAF for the way it integrates civilian crisis management and development experts directly into the PRT's military structures. In addition, Kanerva noted, the concept of a "Nordic PRT approach" has become a key to selling troop and other increases to Finnish public opinion and, more importantly, to skeptics within the UTVA. Volker and Ambassador Ware thanked Kanerva for his efforts to press for these increases, and commended him for finding creative ways to convince the Finnish public of the importance of doing more. Kanerva was also pleased to report that the UTVA tentatively approved an increase in Finnish humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, as well as a proposal for the GOF to begin offering training to Afghan security forces through an (OMLT).

At Present, "No" on Lethal Weapons and "Perhaps" on Development Aid

15. (C) As expected, the UTVA unanimously rejected long-standing requests from the Afghan and US governments for lethal weapons to be donated to Afghan security forces. Although the Defense Minister reportedly argued in favor of the donation, he and Kanerva dropped their demands in order to gain consensus on PRT leadership and humanitarian assistance. At the time of the Volker meeting there was not full consensus on increasing development assistance. Opposition came from a group within the Center Party and its Development Minister, Paavo Vayrynen. On September 17, Markus Lyra, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, told Ambassador Ware that Pertti Torstila, Secretary of State at the Foreign Ministry, will be working to gain Vayrynen's support over the next month. President Halonen is expected to be amenable to an increase.

NEXT STEPS

16. (C) Kanerva described next steps as follows: First, the MFA will draw together a detailed analysis of the resources necessary to take PRT leadership in 2009; to increase Finland's troop commitment by 50-60%; to staff an OMLT; and to bump up Finland's humanitarian aid donations. Within eight weeks, this will be combined into a single package and presented for final government approval, after which it will go to Parliament for discussion. Kanerva and others were hopeful that Parliament could wrap up its scrutiny of the proposal in 4-5 weeks, and that the policy could then move forward by year's end.

COMMENT

17. (C) The initial signals coming out of the UTVA's discussion are quite positive. Those within the GOF who support Finland's doing more as regards NATO/ISAF were clearly pleased with what they viewed as a green light on PRT leadership and the troop increases that will require. As one participant in the deliberations quipped, "We didn't get everything we wanted, but we did better than we thought we would." That said, Kanerva and other officials have been quick to note that a tough political discussion within the GOF on Afghanistan policy still looms. "Security policy will dominate the fall political discussion," Kanerva told Volker and Ambassador Ware, adding that there are still "divergences of political opinion even within the government." In any case, we are cautiously optimistic that the outcome will be positive, especially in terms of PRT leadership.

18. (U) PDAS Volker has cleared this cable.

